DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 047 567 FL 002 047

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TITLE	Scansion: The Eye and the Ear. An Experiment.
INSTITUTION	Joint Association of Classical Teachers, Oxford (England).
PUB DATE	63
NOTE	7p.
JOURNAL CIT	Didaskalos; v1 n1 p55-61 1963
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Classical Languages, Classical Literature, Instructional Program Divisions, *Language Instruction, Language Rhythm, *Latin, Oral Communication, Oral Expression, *Oral Reading, *Poetry, *Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

An experiment is suggested in which scansion, particularly of hexameters and elegiacs, may be taught orally and without use of visual symbols through the rhythmic patterns characteristic of the writings of the ancient poets. The author argues that a reading of the Latin hexameters by "cola" will introduce an element of rhythmic stress in addition or in preference to word stress. Such a dynamic element is regarded as inherent in the nature of Latin verse. Deficiencies of the traditional approach to scansion are discussed. (RL)

from: Didaskalos v1 n1 1963

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Scansion: The Eye and the Ear
An Experiment

G. O. BRINK

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The visitor was sitting at the back of the form room. The student teacher glanced at his watch, the visitor glanced at his. Soon the visit would be over. How to fill in the last ten minutes? He caught the visitor's eye. 'Why not read some lines of the Virgil you have been construing?', the visitor suggested, keeping a note of exasperation out of his voice. The student teacher winced and swallowed hard. 'Well, boys, let us scan the passage', said he, adding brightly, – 'and mind you mark the caesura in every line'. A rustle could be heard. The form, as one boy, had opened their desks, pulling out pencil and paper. The master too had reached for pencil and paper. Silence settled on the fifth form. The paper game, known as Latin Scansion, had begun.

Hearing this story (which is not fiction), many will feel superior. But will they feel superior for the right reason? I am not so sure. How should the young be taught to read ancient verse, above all the verse most widely read, Latin hexameters? The sceptics say –'don't even try; we do not know what ancient verse sounded like'. That is true up to a point. Yet the *structure* of verse is an essential part of the *nature* of verse. More can be known about that structure than a facile scepticism would suggest.

Many others will be content to read Latin verse as prose. Bring out quantity and (dynamic) word-accent (not to mention sense and punctuation) and the rest will follow: *quantitatem tene, versus sequetur.* I will not here ask whether this belief is justified. I will

say however that as a teaching procedure it fails to direct attention to the structure of a line of verse. The only teaching procedure known to me which does direct attention to verse structure is the traditional way of scansion by symbols representing 'feet'.

Scansion on paper has three grave deficiencies, particularly if it is practised as is now customary, and is encouraged in certain examinations.

1 It teaches to divide the line into six abstract entities known as feet and clearly far removed from the rhythmic structure of the Latin.

Musa mi-	hi cau-	sas memo-	ra quo	numine	laeso
– ∪ ∪	– –	– ∪ ∪	– –	– ∪ ∪	– –

(Virgil, *Aen.*, i. 8)

Why torture the line into entities which are equally unrelated to the rhythm of the line and the words that embody the rhythm?

2 It perpetuates the strange theory that an hexameter has one and only one break known as 'the caesura'.

– ∪∪ | – ∪∪ | – ∪∪ | – ∪∪ | – ∪∪ | – –

Why talk of 'the caesura' when this line has at least three?

Musa mihi	causas	memora	quo numine laeso
– ∪ ∪ –	– –	∪ ∪ –	– – ∪ ∪ – –

(Precisely how many, remains to be determined.)

3 Worst of all, it makes auditory elements into visual. The learners are not helped to use their ears but to look for symbols: – or ∪ or –∪∪ or – –. The mind is trained to move from an abstraction (the 'foot') to a symbol on paper. With so much mental energy wasted on needless abstractions, what energy is there left for what is indispensable – the rhythmic structure of a live line of verse?

Is there a way to teach Latin (and Greek) metre by training chiefly the ear? I believe there is. I suggest as an experiment that 'scansion', at any rate of hexameters and elegiacs, may be taught orally and without use of visual symbols through the rhythmic patterns which all ancient poets seem to have used. Take the Latin hexameter as a basis for the experiment. Open

the Oxford text of Virgil at any place you like, for example Anchises' speech at *Aeneid*, vi. 724. Try to determine where there is a rhythmic entity at the beginning of each line. Such an entity need be neither a sense group nor need it imply a marked pause in delivery.

–⏑⏑		or	– –
726	spiritus	729	et quae
730	igneus	735	quin et
736	non tamen	741	suspens(ae)
737	corpore(ae)	742	infect(um)
740	supplici(a)	745	donec
744	mittimur	746	concret(am)
750	scilicet	749	Lethae(um)
751	rursus et		

–⏑⏑–		or	– – –
724	principio	732	terreniqu(e)
727	mens agitat	748	has omnis
728	inde hominum		
731	seminibus		
733	hinc metuunt		
734	dispiciunt		
738	multa diu		
743	quisque suos		
747	aetherium		

No such entity:

725 lucentemque
739 ergo exercentur

Here are 28 consecutive hexameters chosen at random. All but two of them begin with the rhythm marked by word ends after –⏑̄⏑̄ or –⏑̄⏑̄–. Let this be considered a first hypothetical unit, A. The two lines that lack this break have an especial rhythmic significance.

It is easy to discover a second hypothetical unit, B, because the place near the middle of the line has always impressed listeners as the habitat of '*the caesura*'. When the line begins –⏑̄⏑̄, the unit following it must be –⏑̄⏑̄– if it is to end at the caesura known as

'semiquinaria' : $\overset{1}{_}\overset{2}{\overline{\cup\cup}}_\overset{3}{\overline{\cup\cup}}\overset{4}{_}\overset{5}{\cup}$/. Likewise when the line begins –∪∪– the following unit will be $\overline{\cup\cup}$– if there is to be a break at the semiquinaria. We then get the following possibilities:

$\overset{1}{_}\ \overset{2}{\overline{\cup\cup}}$ $\qquad\qquad$ $\overset{3}{_}\ \overset{4}{\overline{\cup\cup}}\ \overset{5}{_}$

$\overset{1}{_}\ \overset{2}{\overline{\cup\cup}}\ \overset{3}{_}$ $\qquad\qquad$ $\overset{4}{\overline{\cup\cup}}\ \overset{5}{_}$;

that is, either *donec longa dies* or *quisque suos patimur*. Once more it is made plain that the units need not be sense units; nor need they imply pauses in delivery. They are rhythmic entities and the ear can be taught to perceive them as such. The middle break need not of course be in the same place. But the semiquinaria is the standard break in this portion of the line and we are now looking for the standard break. Let us simply allow for the possibility of 'the third trochee', or lines like 728 *inde hominum pecudumque*. Moreover once again lines without any kind of caesura in this place should be appreciated as especial cases. Even beginners are likely to appreciate – once it is pointed out to them – the particular nature of long proper names or words that completely cover any middle caesura, such as *Aeneas Anchisiades*.

Now it is an impressive feature of Latin hexameters that the next place after the middle of the line where words most frequently end is the seventh half-foot, or 'semiseptinaria'. (C).

724	principio	caelum ac	*terram*
725	lucentemque	globum	*lunae*
726	spiritus	intus alit	*totamqu(e)*
727	mens agitat	molem et	*magno*
728	inde hominum	pecudumquĕ	*genus*

Again there are competitors: two in this place of the line. Instead of $\overset{\cup\cup}{\overline{\quad}}$ _, the third unit may be $\overset{\cup\cup}{\overline{\quad}}$ _ ∪, as at 729 et quae marmoreo *fert monstra*. Or else it may be $\overset{\cup\cup}{\overline{\quad}}$ _ ∪∪, as at 731, seminibus, quantum *non corpora*.

Finally the end of the line, D. If the standard break, the semiseptinaria, precedes, the line-ending will be

724	principio	caelum ac	terram	*cāmpōsquĕ lĭquēntĭs*
725	lucentemque	globum	lunae	*Titaniaque astra*

726 spiritus intus alit totamque *infusa per artus*
727 mens agitat molem et magno *se corpore miscet*
728 inde hominum pecudumque genus *vitaeque volantum* . .

If the third unit is $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – ∪, the fourth will begin with a short syllable, that is, ∪ – ∪∪ – –:

729 et quae marmoreo fert monstra *sub aequore pontus;*

or else if $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ precedes ('bucolic caesura') the final unit will consist of 'two feet', – ∪ ∪ – –:

731 seminibus quantum non corpora *noxia tardant.*

No one will maintain that these are the only rhythms of the classical Latin hexameter. But statistics establish that they are the basic units and once the ear has been trained to perceive them, other structures will be perceived as variations.

Here then is a choice between two ways of teaching Latin metre to beginners. One is the traditional way of 'scanning' which reduces the flexibility of, say, Virgil's hexameters to its lowest common denominator, a supposed rigid scheme of six 'feet' in two supposed standard forms:

– $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ –//$\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – ∪∪ – –

– $\overline{\cup\cup}$ –/$\overline{\cup\cup}$ –∪//∪ –/$\overline{\cup\cup}$ – ∪∪ – –

The other (which I am recommending) is designed to catch the changing rhythmic pattern of each line:

– $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – ∪∪ – –

or – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – ∪∪ – –

or – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – ∪ ∪ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – ∪∪ – –

or – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪ – ∪∪ – –

or – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – ∪ ∪ – – – ∪∪ – –

or – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – $\overline{\cup\cup}$ – – – ∪∪ – –

and so forth in the many combinations of this flexible metre. I suggest that scanning by feet is likely to kill any potential pleasure in the rhythmic movement of verse – one of the major pleasures in poetry.

How then do we start from scratch if we wish to accustom the ear to the rhythmic patterns of Latin hexameters? Clearly by

establishing the patterns. Let the classics master try, from the beginning, to establish orally the basic patterns, first through easy passages, later through more complicated. So long as he begins with real patterns which the ear can perceive – not with unreal patterns, 'feet' – the rhythmic sense will assert itself and his pupils will try to repeat what they hear.

The procedure which I am recommending has a further advantage. It relates the quantities of Latin words to their use in verse. Even those who have been taught from the very first to observe a measure of quantity in pronouncing Latin words are yet tempted to shorten a syllable that precedes a stressed position: *principio* tends to dwindle to *prĭncípio* or worse still to *prĭncíppyŏ*. But once the ear has become accustomed to the choriambic rhythm of –uu– at the beginning of an hexameter the first and last syllables of the word are likely to retain their weight. In this way words, phrases, and formulas of the language may be used to illustrate metrical patterns, names or words such as *Iūppĭtĕr*, *Rōmŭlŭs*, *prīncĭpĭō*, *ignōrānt*; phrases such as *cīvēs Rōmānī*, *mactātŭ(s) trĭumphō*; or finally sophisticated and Grecizing formulas such as *dīă dĕārum* (δια θεάων). These are no more than formulas but they show how combinations of words, word-patterns of speech, could be adapted to poetic use. It is well known that metrical patterns greatly assist the writing of verse. The same patterns could help would-be readers of Latin verse to get familiar at once with the metrical shapes of Latin words and the basic divisions of Latin hexameters.

It will be seen that by implication I have found fault with an opinion which I mentioned earlier on. The opinion, which has acquired almost the weight of dogma, may be stated briefly. The nature of Latin verse is said to be perceived sufficiently if verse is read as prose, so long as quantity and word accent are observed. Now it is unavoidable that a reading of Latin hexameters by *cola* will introduce an element of rhythmic stress (however slight) in addition or in preference to word-stress. Such a dynamic element I should regard as inherent in the nature of Latin verse. This contention may be considered con-

troversial by those who concede a dynamic accent to Latin words but not to Latin verse. It should be remembered however that I am not recommending an indiscriminate stressing of the six 'feet' of the hexameter. I am allowing for the possibility, even the probability, that the *cola* of a Latin hexameter were marked by an element of stress.

Scholars will know that there is a theory underlying the problems of teaching which I have ventured to raise in my paper. This is the theory of metrical *cola* in the Greek hexameter, tentatively put forward by Hermann Fraenkel as early as 1926[1]. This theory should have stimulated enquiry but has largely failed to do so. There are still many puzzles to be dealt with before this theory can be said to be established. What I have done in this paper is not to try to establish a theory. I have suggested to teachers that they might try to experiment with a new teaching procedure. A short paper can do no more than sketch the barest outlines. What is needed is experiment. I have myself tried this experiment with classes of undergraduates. I wonder if the same experiment could not usefully be tried at school as soon as the reading of Latin verse is attempted.

[1] *Der kallimachische und der homerische Hexameter*, in the transactions of the *Göttinger Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, and rewritten for publication in the same author's *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens*, Munich 1955, 100-156. Mr Fraenkel's suggestions have been accepted in principle but reshaped in detail by an American scholar, Mr H. N. Porter, in *Yale Class. Studies*, xii (1951) 1-63.
Readers may also be reminded of the oral formulas, and their metrical equivalents, which the late Milman Parry has uncovered in Homer. I refer particularly to Parry's book, *Les formules et la métrique d'Homère*, Paris, 1926, and, for the placing of word-types in the Greek hexameter, to Eugene O'Neill's paper in *Yale Class. Studies*, viii, (1942). Mr. G. S. Kirk has provided a brief account of the basic problems in his recent book, *The songs of Homer*, 1962, pp. 60-8, 119-20.

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